

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Dawson Says Democratic Party Not Responsible For Problems Facing VI

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Democratic candidate for governor Angel Dawson passionately defended the Democratic Party during a forum last night, stating emphatically that the party should not be "conflated" with Governor Kenneth Mapp, and that the party was not responsible for the state of the U.S. Virgin Islands. In fact, Mr. Dawson said the party has been the "salvation" of the territory in some cases, and that "we should be careful about chiding" it.

Mr. Dawson's resounding endorsement and defense of the Democratic Party came during a 2-hour long forum sponsored by The Virgin Islands Consortium and WTJX-TV Channel 12, which was held at WTJX's studio in Richmond on St. Croix. There, Democratic candidates for governor and lieutenant governor fielded questions from

Consortium Founder and President Ernice Gilbert, with the lieutenant governor candidates getting 45 minutes to make their respective cases, while the candidates for governor received just over an hour.

While the candidates for lieutenant governor were questioned mostly on leadership and the Division of Banking and Insurance, Mr. Gilbert pressed the candidates for governor on a number of topics, including the Government Employees Retirement System, crime, the economy and more. The question that Mr. Dawson defended the Democratic Party on was whether the party was responsible for the state of the territory, especially since Governor Kenneth Mapp has been in office for about three and a half years, while the Democratic Party has ruled the territory for most of its existence -- and for the last two administrations, both of which spent 8 years at the helm.

[\[Here's A Recap Of The VI Consortium-WTJX Democratic Forum\]](#)

"Well Ernice, I'd say first of all [what] we must remember and recognize is the Democratic Party is the party that built the middle class of the Virgin Islands going back to the 1950s and 60s, and I believe that the essence of the Democratic Party remains intact," Mr. Dawson said. "We should be very careful about chiding the Democratic Party because I think that the Democratic Party has in many instances been the salvation of the Virgin Islands. Can we do things better? Certainly we can, but I would not say that the Democratic Party has been responsible for the problems that we have in this territory, or in any way conflate Kenneth Mapp and the Democratic Party."

Mr. Dawson took exception to Mr. Gilbert's remark relative to the territory's credit rating and its inability to borrow from the bond market. "I take great pride in the fact that as executive director of the Public Finance Authority, we were able to establish the best bond ratings that this territory has ever had despite the difficult economic conditions that we were faced with," Mr. Dawson said. "We achieved the lowest borrowing cost that we've ever achieved. And in less than three years since I left office in 2014, we have seen this administration drive the bond ratings into the ground for the Government of the Virgin Islands, and it can't even borrow at any rate. So that is truly poor management, mismanagement, and that is why I'm in this race -- to ensure that we can return the competence and the ability that we had previously in this government."

Before the Mapp administration came into office, the Democrats had for years sought funding from the bond market to meet a structural deficit that hovered above \$100 million. This was done annually like clockwork, but when the Mapp administration attempted to seek funding for the first time in January of 2016, it was refused by the bond market, which cited risk in the territory's ability to pay its debts, and its over \$2 billion debt load. The Mapp administration was able to make it through 2015 on a [\\$220 million windfall](#) from the Limetree Bay Terminals deal.

In response, Mr. Dawson said the Mapp administration was not successful when it went to the bond market in 2016 because of structural issues.

"It may be the fault of the way that the deals they were attempting to achieve was structured," Mr. Dawson said. He also criticized the governor for severing ties with the rating agencies, calling it "a critical mistake." Giving an example, Mr. Dawson said, "You're a journalist, you know that you should be really careful not to annoy people that

buy ink by the barrel and paper by the roll."

The forum was the last of its kind before residents go to the polls on August 4, and the candidates passionately made their cases on Tuesday night, hoping to sway undecided voters in their direction.

We'll have full coverage of the August 4th primary.

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